



An Australian Government Initiative



## CASE STUDY:

### **BUSINESS REVIEW – Heather Brae Shortbreads, Thomastown, Victoria**

*Heather Brae Shortbreads is a family business, established in 1941, that produces a wide range of home-style gourmet biscuits. It supplies cafes, caterers, airlines and all major supermarkets across Australia.*

After a recent move to much larger premises and a significant investment in new plant and equipment, Managing Director Bass Wakim explains how the Business Review program gave his company an opportunity to re-evaluate its business plan.

“Our business has grown steadily over the years. We now have a core staff of 40 and we bring in additional casual staff to run a second shift during peak periods. But we’d outgrown our premises and needed to move. At the same time, we faced a slowdown due to the current economic situation. While we’d done our own planning and evaluations, we were very happy to have expert assistance to check we were on the right track.

Our contact was Paul Smarrelli, Business Adviser for Partner Organisation NORTH Link. We found Paul to be excellent - very professional and extremely thorough. Meeting at our premises was a great way to work. He listened to us carefully, got to know our business, looked at all our processes and spoke with key members of our staff.

Filling out the questionnaire took a bit of time. We also had to provide financial information and, while it was all there, we had to compile it into the format that Paul required. So there was a bit of effort involved. We felt that we would get out of the process what we put in and that turned out to be right.

Paul’s final report reinforced that we are on target and that our checks and balances are working well.



Benchmarking us against other businesses showed our strengths and it was encouraging to see that we scored strongly in most areas. The areas in which we were weaker mainly related to outlay on plant and equipment, which was to be expected given our recent investments.

Paul’s key recommendations focused on continuous improvement and finding new production efficiencies, which we are happy to take on board.

Although our current sales are strong, Paul recommended that we increase our customer base through stronger sales activities, such as advertising and participation in trade shows. He suggested that we look more at new product development, including increasing our reach into organic markets. This will ensure that we recoup our investment in plant and equipment.

He also found that our financial reports didn’t give me the information I needed to make management decisions on a daily basis, so we are changing to a different reporting method.

When times are tough, programs such as this are a real asset to local businesses. I found it to be relevant, focused, professional and ultimately effective. I can’t recommend the program highly enough.”

*Heather Brae was provided with a Business Review during 2009 by Enterprise Connect Partner Organisation NORTH Link and Business Adviser Paul Smarrelli.*